



# Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership



# Annual Report 2025

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Friday December 12, 2025

Dear Governor Pritzker,

We are pleased to present you with the 2025 Annual Report of the Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership (ICMHP). This report highlights the completion of the Illinois Department of Public Health’s (IDPH) first full year of supporting ICMHP in 2025. Together, IDPH supported ICMHP members in utilizing a public health approach to advise state agencies and the administration’s Children’s Behavioral Health Transformation Initiative (CBHTI) on children’s mental health issues, with a focus on social determinants of health, prevention, early intervention, and treatment.

This report will highlight ICMHP activities throughout the year, including the appointment of Dr. Sonya Mathies Dinizulu to join Dr. Sameer Vohra as Co-Chair of this important public body. Notably, this report provides you with the opportunity to hear directly from youth in our state – ICMHP’s Youth Council Members – about their recommendations to improve children’s mental health in Illinois.

Thank you for the leadership you have provided to keep a focus on children’s mental health issues throughout your tenure as Governor. With recent federal changes bringing an unprecedented level of uncertainty to many across our state, we have continued to make progress toward our goals in 2025. ICMHP is fortunate to have incredible partners and leaders, as we work to improve children’s mental health strategy, programming, and policy.

Sincerely,



Sameer Vohra, MD, JD, MA  
Director, Illinois Department of Public Health  
Co-Chair, Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership



Sonya Mathies Dinizulu, PhD  
Associate Professor  
Director, University of Chicago Stress, Trauma, & Resilience (U-STAR) Program  
Co-Director, Recovery & Empowerment After Community Trauma Clinic (REACT Clinic)  
Co-Chair, Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership  
Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Neuroscience  
University of Chicago Medicine

# Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership

## Annual Report: 2025



### Introduction

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) achieved its first full year of supporting the [Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership](#) (ICMHP) throughout 2025. The Department is proud to submit this report of ICMHP's work pursuant to 405 ILCS 49/5. IDPH, along with ICMHP's co-chairs, members, and youth council, is committed to advise State agencies and the Children's Behavioral Health Transformation Initiative on designing and implementing short-term and long-term strategies to provide comprehensive and coordinated services for children from birth to age 25 and their families.

This ICMHP 2025 annual report will:

- provide an overview of ICMHP's membership updates and all achievements across its 2025 meetings, which included collaboration with IDPH program offices and the [Illinois Children's Behavioral Health Transformation Initiative](#),
- provide a progress update on the implementation of the Illinois Children's Mental Health Plan of 2022-2027, and
- provide an update on the work of the ICMHP Youth Council, led by the Center for Childhood Resilience at Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago (CCR).

## The Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership at IDPH in 2025

Across 2025, IDPH focused on bolstering ICMHP’s membership and leadership by appointing new members and filling the vacancy of a co-chair to serve with Dr. Vohra to lead the group. Dr. Sonya Mathies Dinizulu was appointed by Governor Pritzker to serve as co-chair of ICMHP in Spring 2025. Dr. Mathies Dinizulu’s leadership brings many years of critical work in children’s mental health to her role, and IDPH looks forward to her leadership as ICMHP continues to grow and support state agencies.

### Biography for Dr. Mathies Dinizulu:

*Sonya Mathies Dinizulu, PhD, is a licensed clinical psychologist, educator, consultant, and public speaker. She is currently an Associate Professor in Psychiatry & Behavior Neuroscience at the University of Chicago Medical Center. Dr. Mathies Dinizulu, founded and directs the University of Chicago Stress, Trauma & Resilience (U\*STAR) Program and she Co-Directs the Recovery & Empowerment After Community Trauma (REACT) Assessment Clinic. Her clinical activities and research focus on advancing health equity for youth and families exposed to violence by identifying risk, resilience, and empowerment factors, navigating systemic inequities, promoting mental health, and developing innovative community-based, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive services and interventions. Dr. Dinizulu extends her work as a consultant with local and national organizations and institutions such as the Illinois Childhood Trauma Coalition, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, the CDC, and the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine. She has been featured as an expert in several investigative pieces such as NPR’s “Those Who Did Not Die: The Survivors of Chicago’s Gun Violence Epidemic”, and The Chicago Sun-Times “Over 1,000 Victims, 126 Dead, Just 2 Convictions: 6 Years of Mass Shootings in Chicago.” She has published peer-reviewed studies, book chapters, and practice briefs, and presents locally and nationally about the impact of community violence, as well as the racial, historical, systemic and intergenerational trauma and violence affecting youth and families.*

A list of currently appointed members of ICMHP can be found [on the Governor’s Office of Executive Appointments website](#). IDPH worked to secure new appointments to ICMHP and re-appoint members who were eligible for reappointment. In total, 12 new members, including subject matter experts from the public and ex-officio members from state agencies, joined ICMHP in 2025. IDPH will continue to work to have a full board of children’s mental health experts during 2026. In addition to working on membership, IDPH drafted new bylaws in early 2025 that were approved at ICMHP’s January 2025 meeting.

IDPH hosted four ICMHP meetings in 2025 covered a range of topics, seeking advisement from members at each meeting and providing opportunities for member engagement and follow up in between meetings. ICMHP 2025 meeting dates, topics, and outcomes included:





**2025 Meeting Date**

**Meeting Topics**

**January 14**

Introduction to IDPH child-serving program offices, new bylaws discussion and approval, [Blueprint for Transformation](#) (“Blueprint”) Recommendation 12 discussion

**April 21**

Impact of federal changes on IDPH, CBHTI Update – BEACON, Community Network Fortification Discussion, Behavioral Health Workforce Center Presentation

**July 21**

Youth Council Presentation, introduction of new ICMHP members and new co-chair, Dr. Sonya Mathies Dinizulu, CBHTI Update – universal mental health screenings in schools

**October 20**

Community Network Fortification Discussion and Suicide Attempt Data Analysis Presentation and Discussion

# The 2022-2027 Illinois Children’s Mental Health Plan: A Progress Update

The current Illinois [Children’s Mental Health Plan](#) was released in May 2022 when ICMHP was supported by CCR. The plan outlines five goals to improve children’s mental health throughout Illinois. The plan informed the development of the CBHTI [Blueprint for Transformation report](#). The progress that has continued on each goal of the plan through both the efforts of ICMHP, CBHTI, and child-serving state agencies is described under each goal below.

**Goal One:** Increase public awareness on all issues connected to child mental health and wellness to decrease stigma, promote acceptance, and strengthen children, families, and communities to identify needs and access support with resources and funding.



Caption: Director Vohra provides remarks in Chicago at a press conference to announce the public launch of BEACON alongside Governor JB Pritzker, Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton, and others.

Increasing public awareness of preventing children’s mental and behavioral health issues is a cornerstone of public health prevention work. Progress has been made toward this goal through ICMHP and IDPH’s partnership with the CBHTI and the public launch of BEACON in January 2025, as well as through IDPH projects that promote acceptance of mental and behavioral health supports.

The BEACON (Behavioral Health Care and Ongoing Navigation) care portal, a centralized resource for Illinois youth and families seeking youth mental health services and care, including state agency support and community-based programs, was [launched to the public](#) on January 15, 2025. BEACON can be accessed at [beacon.illinois.gov](http://beacon.illinois.gov). Several ICMHP members attended the launch event where Governor Pritzker, Chief Officer for Children’s Behavioral Health Transformation Dr. Dana Weiner, and IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra spoke in support of this new tool that will play a critical role in linking families to mental health services in the coming years.

IDPH and ICMHP supported BEACON throughout 2025 in several ways, including a collaboration with the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation during Mental Health Awareness Month (May 2025) that reached more than 400,000 medical, healthcare, and behavioral health providers in Illinois.

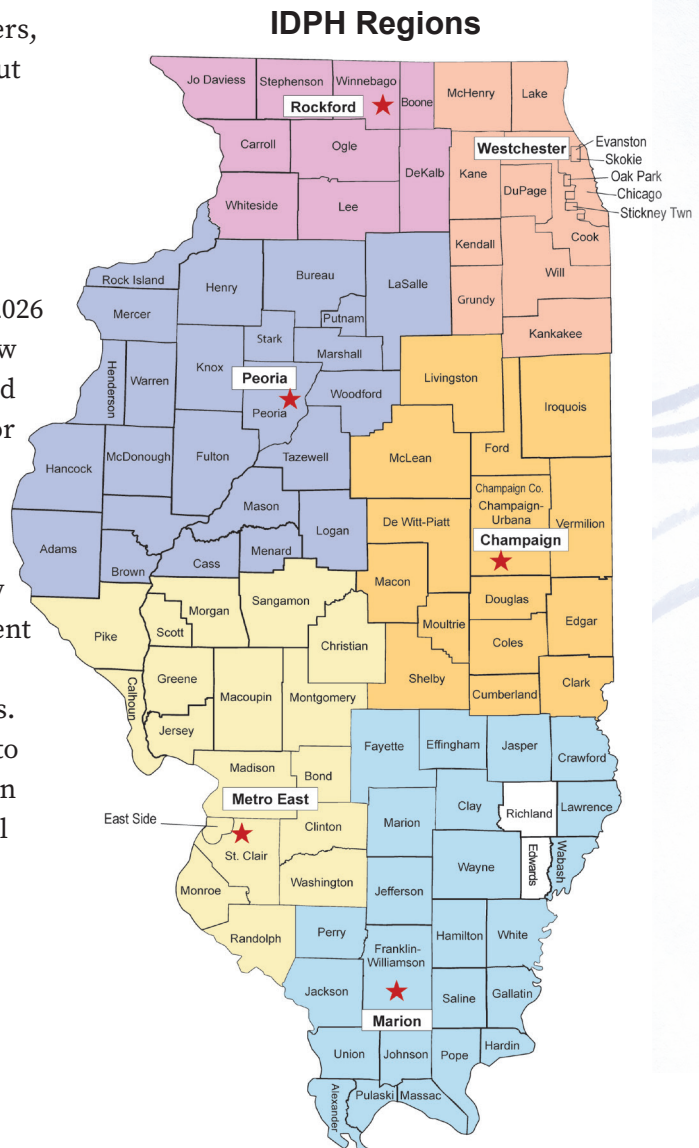
Additionally, ICMHP, in partnership with IDPH programmatic leaders, strengthened communities to identify needs and access supports on suicide prevention. IDPH hosted a Black Youth Suicide Prevention Summit in October and ICMHP focused their October meeting on a review of a suicide prevention project occurring across state agencies. Using a data-driven approach to centering social determinants of health across both initiatives, audiences and ICMHP members heard from subject matter experts about how communities can better engage Black youth and families to prevent suicide and how the children’s mental health system can be strengthened to meet the unique needs of Illinois diverse residents, including Black residents.

**Goal Two:**

Create a coordinating entity responsible for 1) conducting a comprehensive and cross-system needs assessment of programs, services, and policies that touch children’s mental health; 2) monitoring and assessing spending on all child and family mental health and wellness services to determine scope and effectiveness; and 3) fostering innovation of adaptive and new practices to improve children’s mental health.

Goal Two is primarily achieved through the leadership of Dr. Weiner and the CBHTI team, who are the coordinating entity for children’s mental health work at the six child-serving state agencies. One of the efforts of CBHTI involves fortifying community networks statewide. In 2025, IDPH and CBHTI asked ICMHP to provide input on efforts to strengthen community networks across the state. Fortifying Community Networks is Recommendation 12 of the Blueprint and requires investing in local communities and parent leadership. IDPH is co-leading the work of community network fortification in collaboration with CBHTI. ICMHP to advise this work.

With participation from two ICMHP members, IDPH and CBHTI led a workgroup throughout 2025 to develop a regional approach to fortifying community networks called Community Network Anchors. A Notice of Funding Opportunity for this project was released by IDPH in the second half of 2025, and six Network Anchors will work during 2026 to coordinate, organize, streamline and grow community networks across their designated IDPH Region. A Community Network Anchor is regional lead entity funded to coordinate, organize, streamline and grow community networks across an IDPH Health Region. Network Anchors will support and regularly convene local community networks to prevent and mitigate crises utilizing creative and coordinated approaches to existing supports. They will be expected to engage with IDPH to execute best practices across communities in their region to serve and fortify local mental health, public health, behavioral health, wellness, family-centered care, and general health needs of local communities. IDPH will ask ICMHP members for feedback and guidance about this program across each ICMHP meeting in 2026.



### Goal Three:

Develop, maintain, and ensure ongoing monitoring of a hub of programs, services, and policies easily accessible to the public to assist with navigation, resources, and funding.

Goal Three of the Children's Mental Health Plan is also being implemented through the work of the CBHTI – specifically through its work on the centralized care portal, BEACON, and with the ongoing development of statewide resource referral tool.

In 2025, ICMHP supported BEACON's public launch and worked with the CBHTI to raise awareness of this new tool for families. IDPH helped CBHTI staff to lead regular communications meetings about BEACON and reach hundreds of people through in-person and online trainings, conference presentations, virtual communications, and direct outreach. From January 1 – November 30, 2025, BEACON had 31,837 unique visitors from all corners of Illinois. More than 5,000 of these visitors then visited state agency sites after visiting BEACON to explore further resources.

The work on the statewide resource referral tool is being led by HFS and will leverage federal dollars to provide a consistent approach to linking people seeking mental or behavioral health services to community-based outpatient care, including care that helps prevent crises or the need for inpatient care in the future. This effort will be supported by ICMHP as needed in the coming years.

**Along with the work of ICMHP, IDPH has many programs that assist with achieving Goal Three, which fall under IDPH's children's health agenda, IDPH's office of Health Promotion, and IDPH's office of Women's Health and Family Services.**

- IDPH's Office of Women's Health and Family Services began a planning process to establish the goals and objectives of Illinois' Title V Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant in 2025. The newly updated state action plan has a number of priority areas that overlap with ICMHP priorities. One priority is to collaborate with families and community partners to support early screening and connection for children, especially those with special healthcare needs, to a medical home based on family-centered care. The Community Network Anchors grant described under Goal Two in this report is contributing to this objective.
- IDPH's Office of Health Promotion started year 4 (out of 5) of funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration for youth suicide prevention. This funding includes goals of increasing the number of youth serving organizations who are able to identify and work with youth at risk of suicide, increasing the capacity of clinical service providers to assess, manage, and treat youth at risk of suicide, as well as improve the continuity of care and follow-up of youth identified to be at risk for suicide. Four grantees continue work under this funding which directly impacts children's mental health, specifically in the area of suicide prevention.
- IDPH's Health Promotion Office also has funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for Comprehensive Suicide Prevention Strategies. One strategy is teaching coping and problem-solving skills to youth. The office has issued a notice of funding opportunity under this strategy in late 2025.



ICMHP members gather in person for their October 2025 meeting in Naperville, IL.

**Goal Four:** Goal Four: Grow, retain, diversify, and support the child-serving workforce, with special emphasis on professional development around child and family mental health and wellness, and services and supports to address needs.

Behavioral health workforce issues are being addressed in several ways across Illinois. To highlight one of the major initiatives to members, ICMHP hosted its second meeting of 2025 focused on the work of the Illinois [Behavioral Health Workforce Center](#). Members learned about how to share the center’s resources and projects with their organizations and networks.

Additionally, the IDPH Office of Women’s Health and Family Services has supported progress toward Goal Four of the Children’s Mental Health Plan through continued efforts on its Pediatric Mental Health Care Access (PMHCA) program. This program addresses gaps in pediatric mental health care services and strengthens the workforce of pediatric mental health care providers. PMHCA has worked to address provider shortages by expanding the reach of [DocAssist](#), a remote consultation service that provides information and support on the detection, diagnosis, and treatment of mental and behavioral health conditions to pediatric health care providers. In addition to remote consultation services, PMHCA has partnered with the [Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics](#) to train pediatric care providers on mental health conditions and treatment in this population. ICMHP will continue to collaborate with PMHCA partners to further expand the impact of their work in 2025.

**Goal Five:** Goal Five: Fund the design, implementation, and evaluation of system of care strategies that prevent and treat mental health concerns and mitigate trauma by more effectively delivering services.

The implementation of Goal Five of the Children’s Mental Health Plan is advancing through CBHTI and its work on the 12 recommendations to enhance the children’s behavioral health system. ICMHP remains committed to continued collaboration with its members, Dr. Weiner and the CBHTI team, the Office of the Governor, and the five child-serving state agencies to review, advise, and evaluate this work. In particular, ICMHP looks forward to being the sounding board for the work under Recommendation 12 and the fortification of community networks in 2026.

# Youth Council Recommendations

Praxis Institute and the Center for Childhood Resilience (CCR) co-facilitated the 2025 Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership (ICMHP) Youth Council from February to July 2025. The council included six youth participants and four representatives from community-based organizations. Through a six-session model, the leaders guided the youth to explore social determinants of health and equity, while encouraging the youth to identify how those elements were present in their environment. The youth then were supported in developing their youth perspective into a mental health platform. Their ideas were subsequently cultivated into actionable recommendations that were vetted by their peers, leaders, and government officials. The role of Praxis Institute staff was to provide teaching, coaching, mentoring, and inspiration. Lastly, the program culminated in a final presentation to the appointed members of the ICMHP at the group's summer quarterly meeting on July 21, 2025.

## The following are the 2025 ICMHP Youth Council Recommendations:

1. Kids Talk to Kids: A school-based program to build more sustainable mental supports, by supporting students with localized therapists and mental health organizations, creating safe spaces for students, and connecting them to resources and strategies.
2. Community Health Resource Ambassadors (CHRA): Training youth to become community navigators for non-English speakers and Immigrants to aid families in navigating the healthcare systems and establishing health literacy.
3. Addressing the Impacts of Trauma through the Promotion of Healing Centered Engagement: Bringing holistic, spiritual, and civic action for collective action toward well-being.
4. Expand Onsite School Mental Health Services with Post-High School Support: High levels of youth mental health needs are met with resources that can support the transition toward success and preparation for adulthood.
5. Resources for Student Learning Needs in Schools: Supporting students with different learning abilities with teacher one on one support and appropriate strategies.
6. Hear and Heal: Local community providers unite to support mental health needs of community members with a spirit of collaboration versus competition for resources.

The Youth Council recommendations focus on the collective perspectives of statewide youth representatives and partnering community-based organization members. Through their combined conversations about mental health and the needs in communities, their shared voice appropriately elevated educational, community, and healing challenges. Across the categories, they described existing limitations and barriers in vision, funding, and access. By the end of the program, their discussions led to a description of emerging concerns, potential strategies, and tentative policy recommendations. Their recommendations serve as an optimistic blueprint, that with the garnering of broader resources, opportunities, and access, will bring greater equity to youth mental health across the state. The result was a convergence of perspectives reflecting similarities voiced by the prior cohorts of the ICMHP Youth Council, other youth from statewide initiatives, and other youth statewide.

The aforementioned youth recommendations were presented by the entire cohort to adult decision makers, including clinical providers, mental health advocates, policy makers, stakeholders, and legislators in July 2025. During the presentation, the youth had the opportunity to state their collective recommendations based on their community needs assessment and to share their unique perspective. Each youth was given the opportunity to respond to questions by the adult audience. The presentation was met with great fanfare. The ICMHP Youth Council continues to reflect uniquely trained youth from diverse, representative communities across the state whose reputation precedes them.

Structurally, the ICMHP Youth Council will continue with the established pattern of recruitment, interviewing, and onboarding of new members into the next cohort in the winter, onboarding and initial sessions in the early spring, developing youth content knowledge and expertise during the late spring, and presentation to the ICMHP audience in the summer. The ICMHP Youth Council presentation has shifted to occur annually in July to account for legislative scheduling. The original convener of the ICMHP Youth Council, State Senator Mike Simmons, alongside the current IDPH Director, Dr. Sameer Vohra, have remained actively involved providing support for the ICMHP Youth Council and for the youth participants. During this cohort, both Senator Simmons and Director Vohra served as guest speakers at one of the sessions, speaking to both the youth and CBOs while also fielding their questions. Quarterly written reports are submitted to IDPH and a culminating report is submitted to summarize annual activities.

Following the ICMHP presentation, the ICMHP Youth Council members were invited to the annual convening of the Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation (ICHF) by their Executive Director, Heather Alderman, to serve as keynote speakers. The youth described the Hart Ladder of Youth Engagement (Hart, 1992), emphasizing the importance of centering youth when inviting their participation and giving them decision-making opportunities, both early and throughout the process. The youth presenters shared their personal community narratives, reflecting perspectives from both a metropolitan and rural lived experience. The youth participants reiterated their mental health recommendations and the expectations for advocacy. The youth also learned from two other youth advocates in a cross-learning experience.

The experience highlighted the variations in youth experiences of advocacy when there are differences in structured experiences vs. open access to policymakers. Again, the ICMHP Youth Council members displayed their command of mental health knowledge and public health, while practicing advocacy at the highest level. The youth were met with a standing ovation. The ICMHP alumni from 2025 have continued to impress the leadership by pursuing additional extracurricular opportunities since their involvement. Whether it be through a) an invitation for additional speaking engagements, b) having their recommendations adopted at the local level in their community, c) participating in a Lurie Children's Hospital Workforce Development Program focusing on mental health for high school scholars, or d) through applying to a science-based research opportunity for youth at Northwestern University, the youth have been unstoppable in their pursuit to learn more about youth mental health advocacy.

The work of the ICMHP Youth Council is strong and serves as a model elevating youth voice, for advocating for changes in youth mental health in the state of Illinois, and for cultivating the knowledge and skills for the next generation of mental health advocates. Youth empowerment as a driver of change was elevated throughout the process during 2025. Whether youth training to serve as navigators or youth leadership to connect needs in school spaces to community resources, the gap in current practice was elucidated. The ICMHP Youth Council can continue to serve as a model of youth mental health advocacy, mentored and coached by community partners and content experts to develop their perspectives into viable platforms. IDPH will continue to partner with CCR and the 2025 youth council to reflect on these recommendations and offer potential pathways in the coming year.



ICMHP Youth Council members and staff present on a panel in September, 2025.

#### Youth Council Report References:

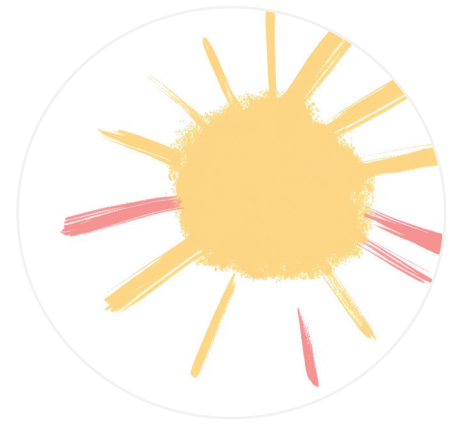
Hart R. (1992). *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence, Italy: UNICEF, International Child Development.

Helmcamp, L. (2023). *Lurie Children's Youth Engagement Guide*, 1-19.

Mental Health Literacy Council (MHLC), Young Adult Advocacy Council, (July, 2025). *Mental Health Literacy: Young Adult Advocacy Toolkit*, 1-56.

# ICMHP Conclusion and Future Outlook

Illinois has much to be proud of regarding the progress of children’s mental health under the leadership of Governor Pritzker and Dr. Weiner. IDPH is delighted to partner and support these efforts by overseeing the future of ICMHP, including the youth council. The following are action items and considerations for the direction of ICMHP’s work in 2025 and beyond:



1. IDPH will continue to strengthen the membership of ICMHP, recommending appointments to the Governor’s Office to fill vacancies with subject matter experts from all areas of the state, including rural and underserved communities.
2. ICMHP will continue to work with IDPH and its senior advisor to the director on fortifying community networks for children’s behavioral health care, as is described in recommendation 12 of the CBHTI Blueprint report. IDPH and the CBHTI will leverage ICMHP’s expertise to receive feedback about the Community Network Anchors grant as it grows into a regional program to strengthen community networks statewide.
3. ICMHP will use 2026 as a year to focus on advising IDPH about public health matters related to children’s mental health with a focus on addressing Goal One of the 2022-2027 Children’s Mental Health Plan. Four meetings are planned, with a unique structure that will allow for members to advise IDPH, CBHTI, and state agencies through pre-reading materials sent in advance of the meeting and meeting presenters being prepared to answer specific questions of ICMHP members. Topics may include: IDPH adverse childhood experiences and positive childhood experiences surveys, infant and early childhood relational and mental health, cross-agency suicide prevention efforts, and/or the impact of social media on youth mental health.

IDPH looks forward to the opportunity to receive advisement from ICMHP throughout 2026 as the current Children’s Mental Health Plan continues to advance, and we look ahead to what future generations will need to achieve optimal health and mental health.



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